

woman from St. John's was obdurate. Not a hint escaped her in response to the baiting and awkward interrogation of Tommy Lark and Sandy Row!; and the more they besought her, the more suspicious she grew. She was an obstinate young person—she was precise, she was scrupulous, she was of a secretive, un-trustful turn of mind; and as she was ambitious for advancement from the dreary isolation of Point-o'-Bay Cove, she was not to be entrapped or entreated into what she had determined was a breach of discipline.

"This telegram," said she, "is an office secret, as I have told you already. I have my orders not to betray office secrets."

Tommy Lark was abashed.

"Look you," he argued. "If the message is of no consequence an' could be delayed—"

"I haven't said that it is of no consequence."

"Then 'tis of consequence!"

"I don't say that it is of consequence. I don't say anything either way. I don't say anything at all."

"Well, now," Tommy complained, "t' carry that message across Scalawag Run would be a wonderful dangerous—"

"You don't have to carry it across."

"True. Yet 'tis a man's part t' serve—"

"My instructions," the young woman interrupted, "are to deliver messages as promptly as possible. If you are crossing to Scalawag Harbor to-night, I should be glad if you would take this telegram with you. If you are not—well, that's not my affair. I am not instructed to urge anybody to deliver my messages."

"Is the message from a maid?"

"What a question!" the young woman exclaimed indignantly. "I'll not tell you!"

"Is there anything about sickness in it?"

"I'll not tell you."

"If 'tis a case o' sickness," Tommy declared, "we'll take it across, an' glad t' be o' service. If 'tis the other matter—"

"What other matter?" the young woman flashed.

"Well," Tommy replied, flushed and awkward, "there was another little matter between Elizabeth Lute an'—"

The young woman started.

"Elizabeth Lute!" she cried. "Did you say Elizabeth Lute?"

"I did, ma'am."

"I said nothing about Elizabeth Lute."

"We knows 'tis from she."

"Ah-ha!" the young woman exclaimed. "You know far too much. I think you have more interest in this telegram than you ought to have."

"I confess it."

The young woman surveyed Tommy Lark with sparkling curiosity. Her eyes twinkled. She pursed her lips.

"What's your name?" she inquired.

"Thomas Lark."

The young woman turned to Sandy Row!.

"What's your name?" she demanded.

"Alexander Row!." Is there—is there anything in the telegram about me? Aw, come now!"

"Wouldn't you like to know?" she teased, her face dimpling.

Sandy Row! responded readily to this dimpling, flashing banter. A conclusion suggested itself with thrilling conviction.

"I would!" he declared.

"And to think that I could tell you!"

"I'm sure you could, ma'am!"

The young woman turned to Tommy Lark.

"Your name's Lark?"

"Yes, ma'am. There's nothin'—there's nothin' in the telegram about a man called Thomas Lark, is there?"

"And yours is Row!?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"I'm new to these parts," said the young woman, "and I'm trying to learn all the names I can master. Now, as for this telegram, you may take it or leave it, just as you will. What are you going to do? I want to close the office now and go home to tea."

"We'll take it," said Sandy Row!. "Eh, Tommy?"

"Ay."

With that the young woman handed the sealed envelop to Tommy Lark.

Tommy Lark thrust the telegram in his waistcoat pocket and buttoned his jacket. Both men turned to the path that led to the shore of the sea.

"One o' the two of us," said Sandy Row!, "is named in that telegram. I'm sure of it."

Tommy Lark nodded.

"I knows it," Sandy proceeded, "because I seed a flicker in the woman's eye when she learned the two names of us. She's a sly one, that young woman!"

"Ay."

"You is chosen, Tommy."

"No, 'tis not I. 'Tis you. You is selected, Sandy. The woman twinkled when she named you. I marked it t' my sorrow."

"The maid would not choose me, Tommy," Sandy replied, his face awry with a triumphant smile, "when she might have you."

"She've done it."

In advance, on the path to the crest of Black Cliff, Tommy Lark was downcast and grim. Of a faithful, kindly nature in respect to his dealings with others, and hopeful for them all, and quick with an inspiring praise and encouragement, he could discover no virtue in himself, nor had he any compassion when he phrased the chapters of his own future; and though he was vigorous and decisive in action, not deterred by the gloom of any prospect, he was of a gray, hopeless mind in a crisis.

Row!, however, was of a saucy, sanguine temperament; his faith in his own deserving was never diminished by discouragement; nor, whatever his lips might say, was he inclined to foresee in his future any unhappy turn of fortune. The telegraph operator, he was persuaded, had disclosed an understanding of the situation in a twinkle of her blue eyes. Row! was uplifted—triumphant.

In the wake of Tommy Lark he grinned, his teeth bare with delight and triumph. And as for Tommy Lark, he plodded on, striving grimly up the hill, his mind sure of its gloomy inference, his heart wrenched, his purpose resolved upon a worthy course of feeling and conduct. Let the dear maid have her way! She had chosen her happiness. And with that a good man must be content.

IN the courtship of pretty Elizabeth Lute, Tommy Lark had acted directly, bluntly, impetuously, according to his nature. And he had been forehanded with his declaration. It was known to him that Sandy Row! was pressing the same pursuit to a swift conclusion. Tommy Lark loved the maid. He had told her so with indiscreet precipitation; and into her confusion he had flung the momentous question.

"Maid," said he, "I loves you! Will you wed me?"

Sandy Row! had proceeded to the issue with delicate caution, creeping toward it by inches, as a man stalks a caribou. Having surmised Tommy Lark's intention, he had sought the maid out unwittingly not an hour after her passionate adventure with Tommy Lark, and had cast the die of his own happiness.

In both cases the effect had been the same. Elizabeth Lute had wept and fled to her mother like a frightened child; and she had thereafter protested, with tears of indecision, torn this way and that until her heart ached beyond endurance, that she was not sure of her love for either, but felt that she loved both, nor could tell whom she loved the most, if either at all. In this agony of confusion, terrifying for a maid, she had fled beyond her mother's arms, to her grandmother's cottage at Grace Harbor, there to deliberate and decide, as she said; and she had promised to speed her conclusion with all the determination she could command, and to return a letter of decision.

In simple communities, such as Scalawag Harbor, a telegram is a shocking incident. Bad news must be sped; good news may await a convenient time.

Thus, Tommy Lark's conception of the urgency of the matter mounted high and oppressed him. Elizabeth Lute would not lightly despatch a telegram from Grace

Harbor to her mother at Scalawag. Something was gone awry with the maid. She was in trouble. She was in need. She was ill. She might be dying!

When Tommy Lark and Sandy Row! came to the crest of Black Cliff, a drizzle of rain was falling in advance of the fog. The wind was clipping past in soggy gusts that rose at intervals to the screaming pitch of a squall. A drab mist had crept around Point-o'-Bay and was spreading over the ice in Scalawag Run.

AT the edge of the ice, where the free black water of the open met the huddled floe, the sea was breaking. There was a tossing line of white water—the crests of the breakers flying away in spindrift like long white manes in the wind.

"'Tis a perilous task t' try," said Tommy Lark. "I never faced such a task afore. I fears for my life."

"'Tis a madeap thing t' try!"

"Ay, a madeap thing. A man will need madman's luck t' come through with his life."

"Pans as steep as a roof out there!"

"Slippery as butter, Sandy. 'Twill be ticklish labor t' cling t' some o' them when the sea cants them high. I wish we had learned t' swim, Sandy, when we was idle lads t'gether. We'll sink like two jiggers if we slips into the water. Is you comin' along, Sandy? It takes but one man t' bear a message. I'll not need you."

"Tommy," Sandy besought, "will you not listen t' reason an' wisdom?"

"What wisdom, Sandy?"

"Leave us tear open the telegram an' read it."

"Hoosh!" Tommy ejaculated. "Such a naughty trick as that! I'll not do it."

"'Tis a naughty trick that will save us a pother o' trouble."

"I'm not chary o' trouble in the maid's behalf."

"'Twill save us peril."

"I've no great objection t' peril in her service. I'll not open the telegram; I'll not intrude on the poor maid's secrets. Is you comin' along?"

Sandy Row! put a hand on Tommy Lark's shoulder.

"What moves you," said he impatiently, "to a mad venture like this, with the day as far sped as it is?"

"I'm impelled."

"What drives you?"

"The maid's sick."

"Huh!" Sandy scoffed. "A lusty maid like that! She's not sick. As for me, I'm easy about her health. She's as hearty at this minute as ever she was in her life. An' if she isn't, we've no means o' bein' sure that she isn't. 'Tis mere guess-work. We've no certainty of her need. T' be drove out on the ice o' Scalawag Run by the guess-work o' fear an' fancy is a folly. 'Tis not demanded. We've every excuse for lyin' the night at Point-o'-Bay Cove."

"I'm not seekin' excuse."

"You've no need t' seek it. It thrusts itself upon you."

"Maybe. Yet I'll have none of it. 'Tis a craven thing t' deal with."

"'Tis mere caution."

"Well, well! I'll have no barter with caution in a case like this. I crave service. Is you comin' along?"

Sandy Row! laughed his disbelief.

"Service!" said he. "You heed the clamor o' your curiosity. That's all that stirs you."

"No," Tommy Lark replied. "My curiosity asks me no questions now. Comin' up the hill, with this here telegram in my pocket, I made up my mind. 'Tis not I that the maid loves. It couldn't be. I'm not worthy. Still an' all, I'll carry her message t' Scalawag Harbor. I've no need o' you, Sandy. You've no call t' come. You may do what you likes an' be no less a man. As you will, then. Is you comin'?"

Sandy reflected.

"Tommy," said he then, reluctantly, "will you listen t' what I should tell you?"

"I'll listen."

"An' will you believe me an' heed me?"

"I'll believe you, Sandy."

"You've fathomed the truth o' this matter. 'Tis not you that the maid loves. 'Tis I. She've not told me. She've said

not a word that you're not aware of. Yet I knows that she'll choose me. I've loved more maids than one; I'm acquainted with their ways. An' more maids than one have loved me. I've mastered the signs o' love. I've studied them; I reads them like print. It pleases me t' see them an' read them. At first, Tommy, a maid will not tell. She'll not tell even herself. An' then she's overcome; an', try as she may t' conceal what she feels, she's not able at all t' do it. The signs, Tommy? Why, they're all as plain in speech as words themselves could be! Have you seed any signs, boy? No. She'll not wed you. 'Tis not in her heart t' do it, whatever her mind may say. She'll wed me. I knows it. I'm sorry, Tommy. You'll grieve, I knows, t' lose the maid. I could live without her. True. There's other maids as fair as she t' be found in the world. Yet I loves this maid more than any maid that ever I knowed; an' I'd be no man at all if I yielded her to you because I pitied your grief."

"I'm not askin' you t' yield her."

"Nor am I wrestin' her away. She've jus' chose for herself. Is she ever said she cared for you, Tommy?"

"No."

"Is there been any sign of it?"

"She've not misled me. She've said not a word that I could blame her for. She—she've been timid in my company. I've frightened her."

"She's merry with me."

"Ay."

"Her tongue jus' sounds like brisk music, an' her laughter's as free as a spring o' water."

"She've showed me no favor."

"Does she blush in your presence?"

"She trembles an' goes pale."

"Do her eyes twinkle with pleasure?"

"She casts them down."

"Does she take your arm an' snuggle close?"

"She shrinks from me."

"Does she tease you with pretty tricks?"

"She does not," poor Tommy replied.

"She says, 'Yes, sir!' an' 'No, sir!' t' me."

"Ha!" Sandy exclaimed. "'Tis I that she'll wed!"

"I'm sure of it. I'm content t' have her follow her will in all things. I loves the maid. I'll not pester her with complaint. Is you comin' along?"

"'Tis sheer madness!"

"Is you comin' along?"

Sandy Row! swept his hand over the prospect of fog and spindrift and wind-swept ice.

"Man," he cried, "look at that!"

"The maid's sick," Tommy Lark replied doggedly. "I loves her. Is you comin' along?"

"You dunderhead!" stormed Sandy. "I got t' go! Can't you understand that? You leaves me no choice!"

WHEN Tommy Lark and Sandy Row! had leaped and crept through half the tossing distance to Scalawag Harbor, the fog closed in, accompanied by the first shadows of dusk, and the coast and hills of Scalawag Island were a vague black hulk beyond, slowly merging with the color of the advancing night. They had taken to the seaward edge of the pack for the advantage of heavier ice.

A line of pans, sluggish with weight, had lagged behind in the driving wind of the day before, and was now closing in upon the lighter fragments of the pack, which had fled in advance and crowded the bay. Whatever advantage the heavier ice offered in the solidity of its footing, and whatever in the speed with which it might be traversed by agile, daring men, was mitigated by another condition involved in its exposed situation. It lay against the open sea; and the sea was high, rolling directly into Scalawag Run. The swells diminished as they ran the length of the run and spent themselves in the bay. Their maximum of power was at the edge of the ice.

Much of the ice lying out from Point-o'-Bay was wide and heavy. It could be crossed without peril by a sure-footed man. Midway of the run, however, the pans began to diminish in size and to thin in quantity; and beyond, approaching the